

# Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial

Concord, California

July 2014

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Dear Neighbors, Friends, and Partners:

I am pleased to announce that the National Park Service is in the process of preparing a Foundation Document for planning and management at Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial. I invite you to join with us in this endeavor.

A Foundation Document involves revisiting a national park unit's core mission and significance, most important resources and values, and the interpretive themes that tell the park's important stories. Although the Foundation Document is not a decision-making document and does not include actions or management strategies, it describes a shared understanding of what is most important about the park. In this capacity, the Foundation Document will reestablish the underlying guidance for future management and planning decisions for the National Park Service at Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial.

Because Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial is a newly established National Park Service unit (established in 2009), preparing the Foundation Document is the first step for considering the park's future planning and study needs.

Your voice is important to us, therefore I invite you to play a role in helping the park lay a solid foundation for moving forward. Please review and provide comments on the draft document so that we may take your thoughts into consideration as we finalize the Foundation Document. You may submit your feedback in several ways:

1. Attend the Port Chicago Commemoration Event on July 19th at Shipyard 3, Kaiser Shipyards, Richmond CA
2. Input your comments by email to:  
RORI\_Superintendent@nps.gov
3. Fill out and mail the enclosed comment form  
(please include first-class postage)

All comments should be submitted by August 20, 2014.

Thank you for your interest in the national treasure we call Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial. As we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Port Chicago disaster, I look forward to continuing to work with you as we plan for its future.

Sincerely,

Tom Leatherman  
General Superintendent

## PURPOSE

The purpose statement identifies the specific reason(s) for establishment of a particular park. The purpose statement for Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial was drafted through a careful analysis of its enabling legislation and the legislative history that influenced its development. The memorial was established as an affiliated unit of the National Park Service when legislation adopted by Congress was signed into law on October 28, 1992. It became a unit of the national park system when the enabling legislation was adopted by Congress and signed into law on October 28, 2009. The purpose statement lays the foundation for understanding what is most important about the memorial.

## DRAFT PORT CHICAGO NAVAL MAGAZINE NATIONAL MEMORIAL PURPOSE STATEMENT

Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial preserves the site of the deadliest home front disaster of World War II, honoring those who lost their lives or were affected by the munitions explosion on July 17, 1944. The disaster and its aftermath illuminated the issues of segregation and racial inequality in the military, and today the memorial serves as a springboard for exploring social justice in our society.



## SIGNIFICANCE

Significance statements express why a park's resources and values are important enough to merit designation as a unit of the national park system. These statements are linked to the purpose of Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Statements of significance describe the distinctive nature of the park and why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. They focus on the most important resources and values that will assist in park planning and management.

### DRAFT PORT CHICAGO NAVAL MAGAZINE NATIONAL MEMORIAL SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENTS

- The munitions explosion at Port Chicago Naval Magazine on July 17, 1944, was the largest stateside disaster of World War II. The blast registered 3.4 on the Richter scale, was felt more than 450 miles away and resulted in 320 fatalities and approximately 400 injured. The memorial is located at the site of the explosion, the final resting place for the unrecovered casualties.
- Following the explosion, as before, surviving sailors received unequal treatment based on their race. Many African American sailors refused to return to work soon after the explosion and 50 were convicted of mutiny in the largest naval trial of its kind in U.S. history. These convictions still stand today despite efforts to overturn them.
- Port Chicago Naval Magazine was the largest ammunition transshipment facility on the West Coast and was essential to the success of the war effort in the Pacific Theater; much of the ammunition and bombs used by U.S. forces in the Pacific passed through the hands of sailors at Port Chicago. This transshipment facility continues to operate today under the U.S. Army.
- The Port Chicago explosion, the mutiny trial, and the African-American community response to these events exposed the shameful injustices of racism in the military. These events were a catalyst for the Navy, the armed services, and ultimately, the nation to weigh the costs of racial segregation. The memorial serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggles for equality and social justice today.

## FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance. Fundamental resources and values are closely related to a park's legislative purpose and are more specific than significance statements.

### DRAFT PORT CHICAGO NAVAL MAGAZINE NMEM FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

- **The memorial.** The memorial, constructed at the location of the explosion, is on the Suisun Bay shoreline overlooking the remnant piers, and includes granite monuments, with the engraved names of the 320 men who lost their lives.
- **Final resting place.** The memorial recognizes those who lost their lives and marks the final resting place of those unrecovered after the explosion. The exposed and open landscape along the water provides a compelling visitor experience, creating a contemplative and inspirational space for visitors.
- **Port Chicago explosion site.** The explosion site—listed in the National Register of Historic Places—preserves the site and remnants of the 1944 disaster, including the pier pilings, the historic location of Pier 1, and archeology associated with the explosion.
- **Historic features** in the vicinity of the memorial. Historic features in the vicinity of the memorial such as the railroad cars and revetment, railroad tracks, military structures, and other landscape elements provide context for visitors to imagine the historic scene of WWII operations at Port Chicago. The location of the memorial on an active military base, which has been continually used as a transshipment facility since World War II, helps visitors understand the historic significance of the operation.
- **The museum collections,** including remnants from the explosion, historic photographs, relevant documents, memorabilia, and oral histories tell the diverse stories of Port Chicago.
- **Richly layered stories**—personal, institutional, and political—provide a lens for understanding the complexity of the Port Chicago experience and its historical reverberations throughout many aspects of military culture and American society





## INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from, and should reflect, park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all park significance statements and fundamental resources and values.

Interpretive themes are an organizational tool that reveal and clarify meaning, concepts, contexts, and values represented by park resources. Sound themes are accurate and reflect current scholarship and science. They encourage exploration of the context in which events or natural processes occurred and the effects of those events and processes. Interpretive themes go beyond a mere description of the event or process to foster multiple opportunities to experience and consider the park and its resources. These themes help explain why a park story is relevant to people who may otherwise be unaware of connections they have to an event, time, or place associated with the park.

## DRAFT PORT CHICAGO NAVAL MAGAZINE NATIONAL MEMORIAL INTERPRETIVE THEMES

- Disrupting the momentum of the Pacific campaign, the Port Chicago explosion was the deadliest home front disaster of World War II; the memorial honors the service and sacrifice of the 320 individuals who lost their lives and the hundreds who were injured or were otherwise affected by the disaster.
- The sailors at Port Chicago who refused to resume loading ordnance under unsafe conditions took a courageous stand in the face of grave repercussions, joining an American tradition of defiance against unjust systems.
- The Port Chicago tragedy revealed systemic racial inequalities and shed light on the magnitude of discrimination, racism, and the blatant disregard for basic human safety in the Navy.
- The desegregation of the military proved that racial integration was realistic and inevitable, and helped inspire the civil rights activism of the 1950s and 1960s.
- The story of Port Chicago is critical because it enriches our understanding of the historic struggles for civil rights, and establishes a continuing legacy for the pursuit of social justice.



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FIRST-CLASS MAIL  
POSTAGE REQUIRED

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
PORT CHICAGO NAVAL MAGAZINE NMem FOUNDATION DOCUMENT COMMENTS  
4202 ALHAMBRA AVE  
MARTINEZ CA 94553

Comments on the draft Foundation Document are welcome and will be accepted during the month-long public review and comment period from July 17 to August 20, 2014. You may submit your comments by email to : [forl\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:forl_superintendent@nps.gov). You may also submit written comments by returning the enclosed comment card by August 20, 2014. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment (including your personal identifying information) may be publicly available at any time. Although you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

WAYS TO COMMENT AND PROVIDE INPUT

Planning Activity	Approximate Timeframe
Public input on draft Foundation Document	Jul. 17-Aug 20, 2014
Review and analyze public comments and finalize Foundation Document	Fall 2014
Park uses Foundation Document to prioritize and begin future planning needs	Spring 2015 and beyond
Public input sought on future planning needs	Spring 2015 and beyond

WHAT'S NEXT?

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Comments:

<i>Park Purpose:</i> Does the draft purpose statement capture why you think Port Chicago Naval Magazine was made a National Park Service unit?
<i>Significance Statements:</i> The draft significance statements describe what is unique about Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial. Do they capture what you feel is most significant?
<i>Fundamental Resources and Values.</i> The draft fundamental resources and values are the ideas and concrete resources that merit primary consideration for protection and management by the National Park Service. Have we identified what you think is most important?
<i>Interpretive Themes.</i> Do the draft interpretive themes capture the stories and themes you think the public should know about Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial?
Please share any additional comments or suggestion for us to consider as we refine the draft Foundation Document. Use additional sheets as needed.